

STACK's

BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Star Trek turns 50 this year, so what better time to introduce non-Trekkers to strange new worlds, to the best episodes, series and movies, and to boldly go where the Beginner's Guide has never gone before. Words: Scott Hocking

[Note: All titles discussed are available on DVD and Blu-ray, except *Star Trek Beyond*]

#6 - STAR TREK

Created by Gene Roddenberry, this "Wagon Train to the stars" introduced the crew of the Starship Enterprise and their mission to explore strange new worlds. The series broke new ground for television during the sixties and is now one of the biggest science fiction franchises in the galaxy and a cult phenomenon, spanning five live-action series, an animated series, and thirteen feature films.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Space: the final frontier. The voyages of the Starship Enterprise and its sibling ships traverse a vast universe (including alternate and shadow dimensions) with a detailed mythology, so the epic scope of the franchise can appear intimidating (much like condensing it for the purposes of this guide!).

The first thing you'll encounter is a very optimistic vision of the future. In the 23rd century, humankind works to better themselves and the rest of humanity, while promoting peaceful contact with new life forms and civilisations.

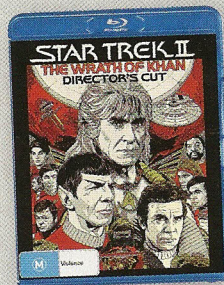
With diversity and equality a hot topic nowadays, you'll discover that *Star Trek* was addressing these issues way back in the 1960s, with a multicultural crew aboard the Starship Enterprise. Moreover, it tackles important social issues like racism, sexism and homophobia within a sci-fi setting, and also explores what it means to be human through conflicted android and alien characters.

But it's not all social commentary; there are strange new worlds and frontiers being explored, where you'll meet wildly diverse alien races (both friend and foe), plunge into temporal anomalies and wormholes, travel through time, and watch intergalactic wars break out.

Perhaps most importantly, it's the characters that will make you fall in love with *Trek*, from

the Starfleet captains and first officers, to the engineers, cadets and non-human recruits, as well as the rogues' gallery of villains and alien adversaries. You'll delight in James T. Kirk's over the top turns, respect Jean-Luc Picard's authority, and become infuriated by Spock's cold logic.

Phrases like "live long and prosper" and "beam me up" are part of the pop culture lexicon, and you'll quickly learn what they mean (a Vulcan farewell and instantaneous transport, respectively). You'll also discover what a Klingon is, and may even want to learn their language (yes, there are courses).



It's not just Klingon you'll develop an ear for: you'll hear a lot of incomprehensible technical and scientific gobbledegook, like "the tetryon field reacted to the probe's shielding, producing a massive graviton wave". This is known as 'technobabble', and the more *Star Trek* you watch, the more sense it will begin to make. Kind of.

You'll realise *Star Trek* was also ahead of its time in terms of the gadgets and technology used aboard the Enterprise – some of which is now a reality: computers that talk and instantly access information from a database of acquired knowledge, tablet computers, universal translators, and handheld communicators.

And the further you travel into the *Star Trek* universe, the more you'll notice that while the

Starfleet crews might be different, the problems they face can be remarkably similar. Yes, given the expansive mythology, there's bound to be a bit of plot recycling throughout the multitude of episodes.

WHERE TO START

Five live-action series, an animated series and thirteen movies to choose from... hmm, where to begin? The best way for newcomers to get a handle on *Trek* is through the movies – those who have never watched a single episode are still likely to have seen at least one *Trek* film.

A good introduction is to sample a cross-section of the film series by watching two movies per crew (Original, Next Generation, and Reboot). The rule to remember with the movies is the odd numbered installments are the best, well, until *Star Trek: Nemesis* and the Reboot films.

Spock would point out that the logical place to start is from the beginning, but whatever you do, DON'T start with *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) or you'll be beaming out before you've even begun. The ideal entry point is actually *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986), simply because it's designed to appeal to general audiences as well as Trekkers – and it's arguably the best *Star Trek* movie of them all. A time travel romp in which Kirk and crew return to San Francisco in the '80s to find a pair of humpback whales (the species is extinct in the 23rd century), *The Voyage Home* is a winning combination of 'fish out of water' comedy and sci-fi adventure, and a great introduction to *Trek*'s characters and concepts.

Backtrack now to *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), which diehard Trekkers insist is the best film in the franchise. Capturing the spirit of the original series, complete with William Shatner in OTT form and a great villain (played by *Fantasy Island*'s Ricardo Montalban), *Khan* is quintessential *Star Trek*.

Now it's time to meet the Next Generation crew. *Star Trek: Generations* (1994) isn't the best



TNG film, but it is the first, and you need to see it simply for the historic meeting of Enterprise captains old and new – passing the baton, as it were.

Star Trek: First Contact (1996) is the best TNG movie and features the series' iconic adversary, the Borg, who are to *Star Trek* what the Daleks are to *Doctor Who*. Time travel once again drives the plot, which involves the biomechanical villains attempting to stop a pivotal event in Earth's history – first contact with an alien race.

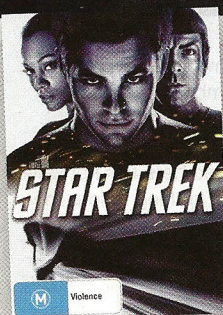
J.J. Abrams' 2009 reboot **Star Trek** hits the reset button, introducing a youthful Enterprise crew on their maiden voyage. Ideally, you could make this your very first *Trek* film (and for many younger audiences it was), but the fact that it messes with the established timeline could leave you seriously confused.

You can skip *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013), which rehashes *The Wrath of Khan*, and proceed directly to the most recent film: **Star Trek: Beyond** (2016). Channelling the Original Series in both plot, tone and production design, it's another entry that's accessible to non-Trekkers, and an opportunity to see a *Trek* film on the big screen prior to its DVD release later this year.

FURTHER VIEWING

If you've made it this far, it's time to take the plunge and begin some serious binge-viewing in chronological order. However, if you'd rather sample a few episodes rather than commit to an entire series, we've handpicked the very best from each on the right.

If you're in for the entire journey, obviously **The Original Series** (1966-1969) is where you'll begin and discover just how groundbreaking Gene Roddenberry's utopian future was. Great stories, polystyrene sets, sixties' decor, loads of cheesy fun and much Shatner grandstanding awaits.

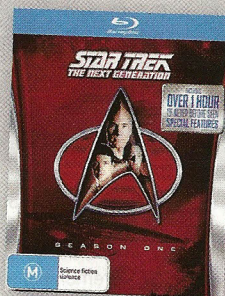


Things get more serious and polished in **The Next Generation** (1987-1994), which is *STACK's* pick as the best in TV *Trek*. Continuing the intrepid, pioneering legacy of Kirk and crew, TNG features Starfleet's greatest captain in Patrick Stewart's authoritative Jean-Luc Picard and boasts some truly classic episodes and iconic characters, like the android Data (Brent Spiner) and resident Klingon Worf (Michael Dorn).

Science fiction and New Age spiritualism collide in **Deep Space Nine** (1993-1999), which takes *Star Trek* into darker and grittier frontiers (think *Trek* meets the new *Battlestar Galactica*), relocating to a space station with a volatile crew and a wormhole on its doorstep. Opting for a more serialised format, DS9 hits its stride in season three and becomes essential *Trek*.

Voyager (1995-2001) returns to deep space exploration and introduces *Trek's* first female Captain – the resolute (and occasionally frosty) Kathryn Janeway, played with Katharine Hepburn-like perfection by Kate Mulgrew. When the titular Federation vessel is catapulted into an uncharted quadrant of the galaxy, Janeway becomes obsessed with getting her crew home, whatever the cost. After a clunky start, *Voyager* will quickly hook you in.

And then there is the much-maligned **Enterprise** (2001-2005), a prequel to the Original Series which recycles plots you've already seen on TOS, TNG and *Voyager*, before finally delivering the goods far too late in seasons three and four. Even diehard Trekkers tend to shun this series. For completists only. **S**



THE BEST EPISODES



THE ORIGINAL SERIES

Where No Man Has Gone Before (S1), *Balance of Terror* (S1), *Arena* (S1), *Space Seed* (S1), *The Devil in the Dark* (S1), *The City on the Edge of Forever* (S1), *Amok Time* (S2), *Mirror, Mirror* (S2), *The Trouble with Tribbles* (S3), *The Way to Eden* (S3).



THE NEXT GENERATION

The Measure of a Man (S2), *Q Who* (S2), *Yesterday's Enterprise* (S3), *The Best of Both Worlds: Part 1 & 2* (S3/4), *Family* (S4), *The Inner Light* (S5), *Relics* (S6), *Chain of Command: Part 1 & 2* (S6), *Tapestry* (S6), *All Good Things...* (S7).



DEEP SPACE NINE

Crossover (S2), *The Jem'Hadar* (S2), *The Search: Part 1 & 2* (S3), *Defiant* (S3), *The Way of the Warrior* (S4), *Little Green Men* (S4), *Trials and Tribble-ations* (S5), *In Purgatory's Shadow* (S5), *Far Beyond the Stars* (S6), *In the Pale Moonlight* (S6).



VOYAGER

Caretaker (S1), *Deadlock* (S2), *Scorpion: Part 1 & 2* (S3/4), *Year of Hell: Part 1 & 2* (S4), *The Killing Game: Part 1 & 2* (S4), *Timeless* (S5), *Bride of Chaotica!* (S5), *Dark Frontier* (S5), *Equinox: Part 1 & 2* (S5/6), *Endgame* (S7).

Enterprise does have a handful of good eps: *Regeneration* (S2), *Twilight* (S3), *E²* (S3), *Zero Hour* (S3), *In a Mirror, Darkly: Part 1 & 2* (S4). And the complete Season Three – with its ongoing 'Xindi' story arc – is also highly recommended.